

HILLS and MACDONALD

Aviator J.J. Hammond and Aviator / Engineer L.F. MacDonald both flew No.10 Bristol Boxkite Biplane that was offered to the Australian Military way back in 1911. (**This was the biplane that Parramattan Billy Hart eventually bought.**) Hammond was a bit choosy on who flew as a passenger with him. MacDonald, maybe because he was a 20-year youngster, was more amenable in taking passengers up.

G.A. Hills was a photographer for Evening News and for Town & Country Journal. He was lucky enough to go up as a passenger with Aviator MacDonald in early May 1911. Below is the whole experience explained by Hills. For being a photographer, he sure makes a pretty fine reporter as well. While Hills was "up in the air", he found it difficult to gauge the passing of time. So, Mr. G.A. Hills was able to time the flight by the number of rolls of film he used.

UP IN THE AIR.

(Up in the Air - Hills & MacDonald - 8 May 1911 - Evening News p3, p7.)

FLIGHT OVER EASTERN SUBURBS.

"EVENING NEWS" SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE.

PIERCES THE CLOUDS FOR PICTURES. MAGNIFICENT MORNING SPECTACLE.

HOW IT FEELS TO FLY THROUGH THE MORNING MISTS. BY G. A. HILLS.

It has always been the ambition of photographers to picture Sydney from above, and at last that ambition has been realised. A long-standing application to go up with Mr. Hammond and take a camera had met with polite but firm refusal. Mr. Hammond not caring for the risk of taking any moveable furniture in the shape of cameras up aloft with him, but with the advent of Mr. MacDonald a new situation was created, and a fresh application meeting with success it only remained to fix a day for the flight, and Monday was chosen for preference on account of the probability of a clearer atmosphere, from Sunday's rest from the smoke of a huge city. My first Impressions of Mr. MacDonald were quite reassuring, for, though he is young—very young—he thoroughly understands every part of the machine, and after seeing him fly in the gusty, choppy wind on Saturday afternoon, one is convinced of his skill as an aviator, and also of his pluck as a man. So, as the crowd gradually disperses, and he is left a little to himself, I have a few words with him about the approaching flight. On the question of appropriate dress, he deprecatingly spreads his hands, and says, with a little smile, "Well, you see how I went up" and as he went up in his ordinary wearing clothes, I decided to do the same.

ARRANGING THE ROUTE.

"And now as to route Mr. MacDonald?" "That depends a good deal on the wind and other conditions, but if everything is favourable, I'll go where you want to go." "Over the city?" "I don't think so. The regulations are a bit against that, and there is a good deal of risk."

"In what way?"

"Well for instance, if the engine happened to stop, the middle of George Street (This is the main street of Sydney. It goes from Circular Quay all the way to Central Railway Station - Greg) is not the most ideal spot in the world to land in. Fancy, if the wind was behind you, coming down at a swoop, and careering along the street at seventy or eight miles an hour."

I suggested it would be exciting, anyhow.

Mr. McDonald agreed, but thought excitement of a milder form, and under other circumstances would be preferable. I did not argue the point.

"You mentioned," said I, "something about your engine stopping?"

"There is a popular impression that if it did you would come down quicker than you went up, as the saying is." "We certainly should come down very quickly" replied the aviator, but not in the way you mean. If the engine stops, or if I shut it off, at an elevation of several thousand feet, there is enough way on the machine to glide down for a distance of a mile and a half or two miles.

"And now, about a camera?"

"A roll film one is necessary, as it is very inadvisable, in fact, I would say inadmissible, to take up plates in loose slides."

"And the reason?"

"Several—one is that a gratuitous gift of a photographic slide with two glass plates in it to the top of an offending citizens' head, is not likely to be appreciated, and might lead to consequences, and another and more important reason (to us) is that should anything of that description get into the propellor when going at the rate it revolves, well, I shouldn't like to attempt to describe what would happen."

I decided not to take any plates up.

"Why," said Mr. McDonald, warming up to the subject, "a penknife might wreck an aeroplane, and I wouldn't trust a sixpenny bit, if it got into some of the workings." "So, if I ever have a yearning to see the effect of a penknife or a sixpenny bit, sucked in by centrifugal force to the inner workings of an aeroplane propeller, it would be not at an altitude of thousands of feet."

"Any other directions, Mr. MacDonald?"

"Not that I can think of at the present time, but when you are up taking photographs and get something which you think especially good, don't thump me on the back."

I promised not to. "Because," said Mr. McDonald, "It's happened to me before. Good night. I'll see you on Monday."

IN THE MORNING.

An anxious look at the sky early on Monday morning showed a slight wind, with the smoke travelling away to the south at about five or six miles an hour, but this gentle breeze had slowed down by 8 o'clock, and conditions from an aviating aspect were almost ideal, though looked at with a photographic eye, it was a trifle cloudy, though not sufficiently so to prevent the keenest anticipation of a successful mission. In this calculation, however, we were somewhat at fault, for on arrival at Ascot at 8.30 we found that although the ground and immediate surroundings were fairly clear, the distance was quite hazy. However, the conditions for flying are so ideal that the opportunity to go up is not to be missed, and at the appointed time the great engine bird is wheeled out, and Mr. McDonald cheerfully says. "Now, if you're ready, I'll get you to mount" and having done so, and Mr. McDonald having also taken his position in front, a few directions from Mr. Smith, the manager of the British Aeroplane Company as to the necessity when taking pictures of not interfering with the aviator, are carefully noted, and all is ready for a start. "LET GO!"

And now the propeller whirred, several pairs of sturdy arms held our beautiful conveyance until its captain should give the word, like the skipper of the old-time merchantman, with his hands to his lips in the form of a speaking trumpet, shouting, "Let go the tow rope," and our serial craft like her prototype of the deep, with canvas wings and wire track stays, and steering gear abaft, is free to roam at will in the clement of the air. A look to the right of the machine, a careful glance to the left, a searching inspection of the elevating planes, a moment to listen to the tale of the engine - for it speaks to our aviator as one who knows its every mood—and everything being ready a hand is raised in signal, restraining hands are removed – and the engine seems to give an extra snort expressive of delight at being free, and, lo! We are off on our voyage. At first like a great canvas-winged bicycle. We speed along the ground. and then - but first let me pause a moment to tell of the peculiar feeling experienced up to that point, from the time of climb to the little cramped position by courtesy called a seat, which you occupy behind the aviator; the slight interval of time in which you settle yourself as circumstances will allow, the last look around for the time being of friends and spectators, the unusual position you find yourself in of being photographed instead of photographing others, the starting of the engine, another interval of time which seems quite an age before the word is given to let go, all occasioning a tenseness of concentration and a tightening of muscle which is quite indescribable and must be actually gone through to be experienced – and then the moment arrives when this tenseness gives way, muscles relax, a delightfully happy feeling.



MR. HILLS AND MR. MACDONALD.
Who made a successful flight this morning.

“It pervades every sense of your being. You have left the ground and are really flying.”

GLORIOUS EXHILARATION.

Oh, this exhilaration is glorious. No element of fear intrudes one becomes a child again, with all a child's pleasure and joy in something entirely new, laughing for very gladness as the breezes of the upper air rush caressingly by swifter and swifter yet; higher still higher; smaller and smaller grow familiar faces of friends, who a few short seconds ago were nodding farewell and wishing a pleasant trip just for all the world as if one were going to the parts of the earth. It all seems so strange. Riding on a voyage and no one to come round to collect your railway ticket, no one to gruffly bombard you with "Show tickets" or "Fares please," though the thought crowds the mind if one could only own a concern where passengers fares were on the same scale as the usual aeroplane fare what fortunes it would mean.

We are over the waters of Botany Bay now, and I am interested in the well described reflection, of being able to see that apparently shallow drop of water, which seems a co-tangential experience with one which I have had at the bottom of a deep mine, at looking up and seeing the stars shining in the daytime. We find from our altitude of a thousand feet that the haze and smoke conditions have become intensified rendering the possibility of good photographs rather remote. In fact, we seem to be continually in the centre of a little clear patch with a dark curtain of haze all around us. So pronounced is this, that it is very difficult to know in what direction we are going, though we seem to be heading out to sea, though, what with the combined difficulties of the haze and the unique experience of being above the ground instead of on it. I had not the

remotest idea for some time after we left the waters of Botany Bay what particular suburb, we were over. After flying for some time little time towards the coast, we turned to the left again.



Flying over the Suburbs of Sydney

THE FLIGHT OF TIME

And then it occurred to me to think how long we had been up in the air how long since we had left the stable terra firma for the unstable atmosphere, the home of the lightnings, the trackless paths of the wireless and highways of the hawk and eagle, sacred no more from the ingenuity of man's marvellous invention and daring, and I found that we had been up just two films. From an aerial photographer's point of view watches and clocks had lost interest, the duration of my flight was centred in the number of exposures I was able to make and I was limited by inexorable manager and aviator to the number of films my camera would take, and I had six of them – six precious films, worth many times their weight in gold and two of them gone. As a golfer would say, I was two up and four to go. So, there must be no reckless exposing of films, they must be husbanded with the knowledge that there is no reserve to fall back on after the active supply is exhausted. From a photographer's point of view, it is quite unusual. There is no possibility of getting too much sky. Your picture is all picture, and foreground troubles you not. There are no obtruding branches of trees which you often consign to a region where wood does not last long, no cheeky little boy runs across the line of your focus of your camera with a "Take my photo, mister," the trammels of the crowd are not in fact photographing with a sky man is "dead easy" from a technical standpoint. The modius operandi consists of pointing the camera downwards as near as you can get it and letting the shutter go, being particularly careful at the same time, for the sake of any wandering pedestrian below, that you do not let the camera go. It seems natural that in a region which is part of the infinity of space, you should set your lens for "Infinity," though it may sound paradoxical that whilst you are stopping up there you should also be careful to stop down.

GETTING USED TO IT.

By this time, I have become a little accustomed to my novel surroundings and have time to take notice of the country below.

A residence which would be described on an auctioneer's catalogue as a beautiful house, with spacious grounds, from dizzy heights of the sky plane, can be covered with the palm of your hand. Main roads become winding tracks, lightly or darkly threading their way over the apparently flat surface of the earth below you; sheltered avenues have retired into obscurity or are represented by what you know intuitively to be dark clumps of trees. You view a well-boomed estate which is being cut up, and which the advertisement says will provide for a good-sized township and you vow to yourself that it seems as if a good hop and jump would land you from one side to the other without much exertion.

That is when we are at our highest elevation. When the elevating plane is deflected, and we come down low I become intensely interested in the people who are stopping their carts, to look upwards at us, mothers with babies in their arms and little children run, all waving us a friendly greeting as we sail over them in the sky. I notice distinctly as we pass over one little garden where some children are looking up with their mother, and their granny, all of them except the old lady, with something white in their hands, to wave at us that she must not be outdone by the others, picks up a long clothes prop and shakes it approvingly towards us.

The personal element seems to be prominent, and every cart on the highway, every pedestrian, every little group that rushes out to view the unusual sight, create a kindly feeling in your breast, and you feel constrained to wave to them your appreciation of their patronage, as an audience. For you feel that for once in your life you are a star performer.

You can pretty well gauge the effect of your appearance in the sky has on your fellow citizens, but it is curious to watch the effect on animals. Portions of a large collection of draught horses at a place I took to be Moore Park seemed quite fascinated when we came above them, their heads being elevated to the sky in quite an unusual fashion those with white faces showing out very prominently as they gazed quietly up at us, then while another section of them, not so sure that all was well, galloped at racing speed till we had passed. At another place as we passed over, a violent commotion below gained new attention and I found we were passing over a duck farm the denizens of which betrayed the greatest agitation.

That is the perspective in front as you look to the right or the left, or over the head of the aviator, or lean over and take a downward peep to the earth a thousand feet below you. And what does it look like behind? The propellor with its six cylinders attached is whirling at the rate of 1200 revolutions a minute. The engine – which is the main consideration in an aeroplane, nor should it refuse duty and go on strike at a place where the aviator could not land in safety disaster would surely follow – is throbbing away in great style leaving no track if we have large splashes of oil which it throws to the right and left on the canvas of the machine.

Strangely enough I found it much more difficult to form any accurate opinion of the country behind than when I was looking ahead. That great propellor roaring its revolutionary way through the air seems to monopolise one's attention altogether. It seemed determined to demonstrate the absolute fact that it was the dominating factor in the whole situation and that should it cease from roaring we should probably soon be where the weary are at rest. I had an intense desire during the whole flight to break the rule of the deep and talk to "the man at the wheel" but although I could hear him pretty plainly, I know it was much more difficult for him to hear me as my voice was carried in the rear and drowned in the propellor's gigantic voice.

At this time the haze was so thick that we got bushed. A slight backwards jerk of Mr. Macdonald's hand indicating that he wished to speak to me and leaning over I heard him say "Where are we?" and at the risk of breaking my throat I called back, "I haven't the faintest idea." "He laughed and said, "No more have I".

UP IN THE AIR. THIS MORNING'S FINE FLIGHT.

HOW THE RETURN WAS MADE.

- BY G. A. HILLS.

We now passed over an apparently abnormal number of racecourses, one of which I was able to locate as Kensington, and informed Mr. MacDonald of the fact. Having now got my bearings, I asked him to steer to the right, as I particularly wanted to get to the Macquarie Lighthouse, and also to skirt the coast over Bondi and along to the heads, for, by this time it was much clearer and brighter to the north

east than at any previous period of our flight.

So, we turned a bit to the right over the northern part of Kensington Golf Links and flying at a good elevation above the Club House, it seemed that we would soon be at the heads.

However, Mr. Macdonald decided at this juncture that it would be well to turn home owing to the thick conditions, and the difficulty of landing in the midst of houses, should there be a necessity for so doing. It is with the utmost reluctance that I viewed this decision for photographic conditions were vastly improving and the sight of the Sydney Heads from an aeroplane, even on a rather hazy day, is a sight. It is disappointing to lose. However, bearing in mind that well-known saying, "Don't argue." I forbore, for, up in an aeroplane one realises to its greatest intensity, the danger occurred in flying over a city or suburb, and the necessity when aviation becomes more general of suitable landing places for flying machines.

We had now been at four films as Mr. MacDonald inclined our sky plane to the left over the beautiful lakes and drives of Centennial Park and it was then the fact was particularly forced upon me how slow we seemed to be going. I knew that it was not really a fact, the engine, during the whole of the flight, was continually roaring at me that it was revolving at the rate 1200 times a minute, and that we were speeding through the air at 45 miles an hour, and I knew better than to disbelieve that engine; but on the same principle that a fast steamer when off the land seems hardly to be moving by persons on shore, so, had I not the evidence previously mentioned, I could have been sure that from 15 to 20 miles an hour was our limit.

Aviation is in its infancy, so was the motor car 10 or 12 years ago, and yet we have the ubiquitous policeman always ready for the motor man who exceeds the speed limit. (Somethings don't change – Ed) I am wondering what standard the aerial bobby of the future who lays await up aloft on the watch for the incautious aviator who exceeds the speed limit will have to go by.

We have by this time we crossed the park and are hovering over the old familiar location of the Agricultural Society and the Sydney Cricket Ground, looking very different to the view we used to, and now to the left a rose Moore Park.

We came home through the haze that we encountered on the way out. Mr. MacDonald evidently knew his direction this time, but I must say that in this return to the haze and smoke I got bushed again, though I know we passed a large school where the whole of the children, dear little dots, they seemed to be assembled in the school ground and greeted us with frantic waving of their arms and I am sure they cheered too as I with others would have cheered myself hoarse at such a thrilling sight of Mr. Hammond and Mr. Coles on Friday last, in their flight over the school. Their cheering was swallowed up by the insistent noise of the propellor.

After we leave the school, I have a dim recollection of having seen what looks like a green chess board but is in reality a Chinaman's garden which looms out down below from the smoky atmosphere. But probably it was a near relation as we did not come that way at the start of our trip and whilst I am wondering exactly where our position is, I find Mr. MacDonald has piloted us straight back to Ascot and a moment or two later we are swooping down at what seems to be at a super pace.

In fact, it seems treble the pace attained at any previous part of the journey and have made a safe descent after having been up six films or in earthly vernacular, thirty minutes.

VIEWED FROM BOTANY.

MANOEVERING OVER THE BAY

Early in the morning, Botany was clothed in a heavy haze, rendering all the more impenetrable by the thick smoke from the boiling down and other establishments curling its way upwards. The waters of the bay were as calm as the proverbial mill pond. There was not even a zephyr to disturb the calm of its breast. Towards 9 o'clock the haze lifted, the clouds of smoke from the countless chimney stacks had practically died away and there was revealed a blue sky flocked here and there with clouds like snowy fleece.

ON THE ALERT

For an hour before the flight, the residents were on alert. False alarm after false alarm was sounded. But it was only the whirr of the motors of the tiny launches flitting over the hazy waters of the bay. Shortly after the local school bell had signalled, there was a loud whirring of a motor.

“By golly,” remarked an aboriginal from the boiling down works. And then the attention of every Tom, Dick and Harry in the establishment turned in the direction in which he pointed.

But they could see nothing. In a few moments, however, a tiny speck appeared, and the whirring became more pronounced.

Nearer and nearer approached the speck until gradually it evolved itself into the aeroplane. Gracefully as a bird it glided on towards the Botany Pier at a height of about 300 ft to 400 ft. Both aviator Mr. MacDonald and the Evening News photographer, Mr. Hills, being plainly relaxed and looking as comfortable as if they were in their own homes enjoying a pleasant pipe.

The beaches of the bay were crowded with seagulls enjoying their breakfast from the delicacies washed in by the tide. As the machine approached there was a stampede among them, and they scattered frantically in all directions, like the horses of a few years ago resenting the introduction of the motor car in the streets the birds of the sea now look with awe and wonder and are probably jealousy at the air motor now trespassing on their hitherto sacred domain.



Aviator L.F. MacDonald flying over Ascot Racecourse - May 1911

MANOEUVRED OVER THE BAY

The daring aviators manoeuvred over the bay, and then, turning like a graceful dove, headed shorewards, and were soon lost in sight in the direction of Ascot.

About ten minutes later however the whirring motor was again heard and shortly after the machine again made its appearance headed baywards. It approached by the pier and then wheeling round, faced eastwards, and skirted along the beach at a height of several hundred feet. It was truly a magnificent sight (Oh! Those magnificent men. Play theme music here - Ed) as the machine vied with the flying birds in the gracefulness of its movements. Handkerchiefs and hats were waved by the admiring spectators, and the machine glided

over towards La Perouse, the aborigines at the station became almost wild with excitement at its approach. They were, however, doomed in a little disappointment. Before reaching the station, the machine was swung gracefully and pointed towards the coast in the direction of Randwick. Gradually the outline became less distinct, the whirring of the motor less pronounced, until finally the aeroplane became a mere speck in the sky and was ultimately lost to sight in its flight towards the city.”

Please note: Transcribing, the above article, was a difficult task as the newspaper print was often indistinct. Some words were substituted; however, meaning was not lost. This was in an age where the inhabitants of Australia were identified as British. Local Government decisions had to be often passed by the relevant departmental office back in London. Also, being politically correct, in those days, was not high on anyone's agenda.



YouTube - Parramatta Heritage Centre - presents the Life and Times of Parramattan Aviator Billy Hart

<https://youtu.be/qVTop4QkgJQ>